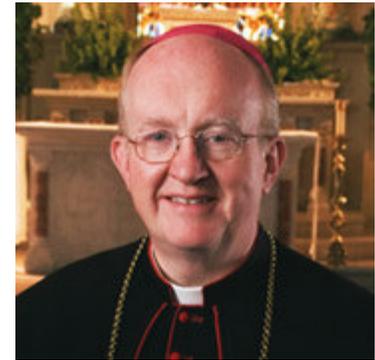


'For Greater Glory' and our current struggle for religious freedom for all

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Recently, I had the privilege with several of my brother bishops of previewing the soon to be released movie "For Greater Glory: The True Story of the Mexican Cristiada" which tells the often untold story of the Cristero War in Mexico and the fight for religious liberty that seized that nation not all that long ago. I was deeply impressed and moved by this movie, and I believe that its release is quite timely given our own recent growing concerns and struggles for religious liberty in our own country. This dark era in the history of Church of the Americas is widely unknown, certainly to most of us here in the United States and even to many Mexicans. I do know, however, from talking to many in the Diocese, especially Mexican Americans who came from Guanajuato, Guadalajara, Zacatecas, and other areas of Mexico are all too familiar with this sad and difficult time in Mexican history and the life of the Church. The parents and grandparents of many of our parishioners knew this trial and suffering personally, yet remained strong as great witnesses of the Faith.



The story of the Mexican Cristiada is one that needs to be told and known not only to remember the many Mexican Catholics who gave their lives for their faith and religious freedom, but to also remind all of us here in the United States that our faith and religious liberty is our most precious gift and it needs to be cherished and protected with courage and vigilance.

The story of the Mexican Cristiada begins with the Mexican Revolution in 1910. What began as a fight for freedom against an aristocratic order and authority soon turned into a multi-sided civil war which turned against the Church, who was perceived as being opposed to the revolution. In 1917, a new constitution was drafted which included several anti-clerical articles which set the stage for almost 20 years of religious persecution against Catholics in Mexico. In 1926, Mexican President Plutarco Elias Calles, a Mason, passed the so-called "Calles Law" which included much stronger and wide sweeping persecutory laws against Catholics. Resistance to these laws began peacefully, with prayer, peaceful demonstrations, signed petitions, and boycotts. However, in August of 1926, several uprisings took place which began the Cristero War or the Cristiada deriving from the battle cry *Viva Cristo Rey!* (Long live Christ the King!).

The Mexican government retaliated swiftly and violently against the Church. The government seized Catholic schools, seminaries, and properties, closed Catholic hospitals, banned monastic orders, barred public worship, and priests and nuns were forbidden to wear religious garments and priestly garb. In addition, Mexico's bishops were expelled along with most of Mexico's clergy. Many Catholics of all states of life: clergy, religious, and lay were also martyred — over 200,000 between 1926 and 1930, in what came to be one of the most brutal Catholic persecutions of the 20th century.

However, like many persecutions of the Church over the centuries, the persecution of the Church in Mexico brought about the rise of many saints and blessed, and through the blood of these brave and holy martyrs the Church in Mexico not only survived, but flourished. The Catholics in Mexico did not cower before the government, but bravely and courageously continued to live their faith and refused to renounce and sacrifice their love for Christ and his Church. As a result of this persecution we now hail such saints and blessed as St. Rafael Guizar Valencia, the Bishop of Veracruz, who operated a clandestine seminary and was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Another was Blessed Miguel Pro, a Mexican Jesuit priest who was executed without trial under President Calles. His last request before being shot by a firing squad was to kneel down and pray. His martyrdom was one of the most publicized and photographed martyrdoms of the 20th century, and his execution was splashed on the front page of Mexican newspapers the following day. On May 21, 2000, Blessed Pope John Paul II canonized 25 martyrs who were also executed during the Cristiada. These brave Catholics stood up not only for their Catholic faith, but also fought to the end for their religious liberty.

Another unknown but important twist to the Mexican Cristiada was that the Mexican government was encouraged in its persecution against Catholics by some elements in our own country. The Klu Klux Klan offered all of its 4 million members to fight with the Calles regime against the Catholics, should any other government intervene militarily. Also, Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, supported Calles in his war against the Church and her "intolerance," so that Sanger's own work of birth control and population control could be rid of the opposition and influence of the Church. Sanger stated, "With the yoke of medievalism thus thrown off, we can anticipate a splendid development of the government work for birth control already begun in Mexico." Even the U.S. government under the Coolidge Administration showed a tepid response to the crisis in Mexico. History shows and teaches us that there were and still are many anti-Catholic influences in our country that are at work, slowly eroding religious liberty and which readily support the suppression of the Church even in our own country.

As I said earlier, the timing of the release of "For Greater Glory" is providential as the truth of this dark side of Mexico's past and this sad chapter in the life of the Church in America teaches us from history the great gift of our faith and our religious liberty — and that this gift is not one that we can take lightly or for granted. This terrible persecution of the Church happened less than 100 years ago and in our neighboring country of Mexico with the assistance of some influences in our own country which are still very much alive and well today! I encourage all of you to take some time to see this great movie and to reflect upon the gift of our faith and our religious liberty that we have been given in this great country of ours. But also recognize that this gift of religious liberty is under attack in an unprecedented way in the history of our nation and that we need to respond with courage, diligence, and faith.

There is also another side of this story that is relevant for our time that Archbishop José Gomez of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles pointed out in a recent column in the Archdiocesan newspaper *The Tidings*. Blessed María Inés Therese Arias was beatified last month in Mexico City. Born in Mexico in 1904, she joined the Poor Clare sisters in Mexico City. In 1929 she fled the violence of the Cristero Wars, immigrated to the United States and arrived in Los Angeles. She then became the foundress of the Poor Clare Missionary Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. This immigrant from Mexico, fleeing the violence of the Cristero Wars has contributed much to the Church of the United States. As Archbishop Gomez points out, the story of Blessed María Arias calls us to reflect upon how our country welcomes immigrants, especially as the U.S. Supreme Court recently heard arguments regarding Arizona's immigration law. Archbishop Gomez states:

Our Church is a Church of immigrants. It always has been. Just as America has always been a nation of immigrants. Except for a few, all of our saints, blessed, and venerables were immigrants. Some, like St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, were canonized for their service to our immigrant communities.

Today we seem to be losing this sense of America's heritage — as a land of missionaries, immigrants and saints. A land where men and women from every race, creed and nation can live as brothers and sisters.

That's why this Arizona case is important. Every year, state governments keep passing new anti-immigrant laws. There were 197 new laws in 2011 and 208 the year before that, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

These laws express people's anger and frustration. Everyone knows our national immigration system is broken. So far Congress and the President have not found a way to fix it. There has been no real movement at the national level since comprehensive immigration reform failed in Congress in 2007.

Our national "policy" right now is to arrest and deport as many illegal immigrants as we can. Last year alone, our government deported nearly 400,000 people, a record number.

Of course, we're not just talking about statistics. Each of these "numbers" is a person, many of them Catholics. Many are mothers or fathers who, without warning, won't be coming home for dinner tonight. Many may never see their children grow up.

This is not a "solution" worthy of a great nation. In the name of enforcing our laws, we are now breaking up families. We're punishing innocent children for the crimes of their parents.

We are a better people than this.

America has always been a nation of justice and law. But we are also a people of compassion. We can find a better way. It begins by remembering the promise of America — as a land where poor immigrants can become great saints.

I join Archbishop Gomez and my other brother Bishops in asking that we find a solution to our broken immigration system, one that both secures our borders and also allows immigrants to come into our country with their gifts, talents, and great faith to help our country to flourish and prosper with the blessings that they bring. This is one of the more important issues that face our country today, especially here in Texas and the Southwest and a just and reasonable solution needs to be found soon.

As we approach the great feast of Pentecost, I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and guide our great country, especially with the gift of fortitude as we continue as Catholics to defend and stand up for our religious freedom and also work to ensure that the immigrant can be safely and justly welcomed into our country to continue to enrich us all with their gifts and presence. May God bless you and your families.